

Case 6.

Several cell phone companies now offer a service that allows parents to track their children's whereabouts using their cell phones. Sprint, for example, has its Family Locator Service. Whoever pays for the phone is provided the ability to track it with GPS. (Global Positioning System, a satellite based navigation technology) In Finland permission is needed for tracking anyone over fifteen. The United States has no such law.

Parents who favor tracking are looking for security in light of child abductions, terrorist warnings, and online predators. C.T. O'Donnell, president of KidsPeace, tell his two teens, "It's my job as a parent to protect you." Robert Butterworth, a Los Angeles therapist, points out, "When I was growing up, neighbors were always watching us, and we didn't want to mess up because somebody might tell [our parents]. That sense of community no longer exists because no one wants to get involved, so parents are forced to use technology." In agreement with child therapists, O'Donnell agrees that kids should be told they are being tracked and why.

Critics warn that tracking children, with or without their permission, can erode trust and create anxiety about a "dangerous world." They worry that kids will become resentful and look for ways to avoid tracking. Some suggest that unless a child has violated trust, such devices do more harm than good.